

SC CHILD EARLY READING DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION PROGRAM

Report for FY 2014 & 2015



**SC EDUCATION
OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**



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Executive Summary

Following two years of expanded access to publicly funded pre-kindergarten, over 12,000 at-risk four-year-olds participate in state-funded full-day four-year-old kindergarten, formerly known as the Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP). Including Head Start and ABC Voucher federal programs, 46 percent of all at-risk four year-olds in the state of South Carolina are served in a publicly funded program.

In the current fiscal year, at-risk four-year-olds residing in 60 school districts are eligible to enroll in a program in either a public school or in a private child care center. An overwhelming majority of CDEPP students are enrolled in public school settings (86%). Statewide, district participation has increased to 57 school districts representing 542 classrooms in 225 schools. Approximately 144 child care centers educate CDEPP students, representing the remaining 14%. There are still more than 20,000 at-risk¹ four-year-olds who reside in districts that are not eligible for CDEPP. The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) administers CDEPP in public schools, and the South Carolina Office of First Steps (First Steps) leads CDEPP implementation in private child care settings.

Within participating CDEPP districts, a greater percentage of CDEPP students met or exceeded state standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics than did low-income students in CDEPP districts who did not participate in the program. While progress within CDEPP districts is encouraging, the achievement gap² between CDEPP students and all other students in South Carolina is not narrowing, and in mathematics the achievement gap may be increasing.

To address the achievement gap, the State should prioritize enhancing the quality of CDEPP provision by:

- Incentivizing advancements in quality and improvement in young students' readiness.
- Fostering private child care participation and advancement in the ABC Quality program,
- Providing ongoing assessment of both students and classroom environments in both public school and private child care settings,
- Ensuring consistent, high quality provision of training, technical assistance and other professional development opportunities for early childhood educators throughout CDEPP districts, with a focus on math as well as language and literacy, and
- Encouraging more seamless, coordinated, integrated provision of pre-kindergarten programs among all pre-kindergarten settings (public, private, and Head Start).

¹ At-risk means children who live in poverty and are at-risk of school failure.

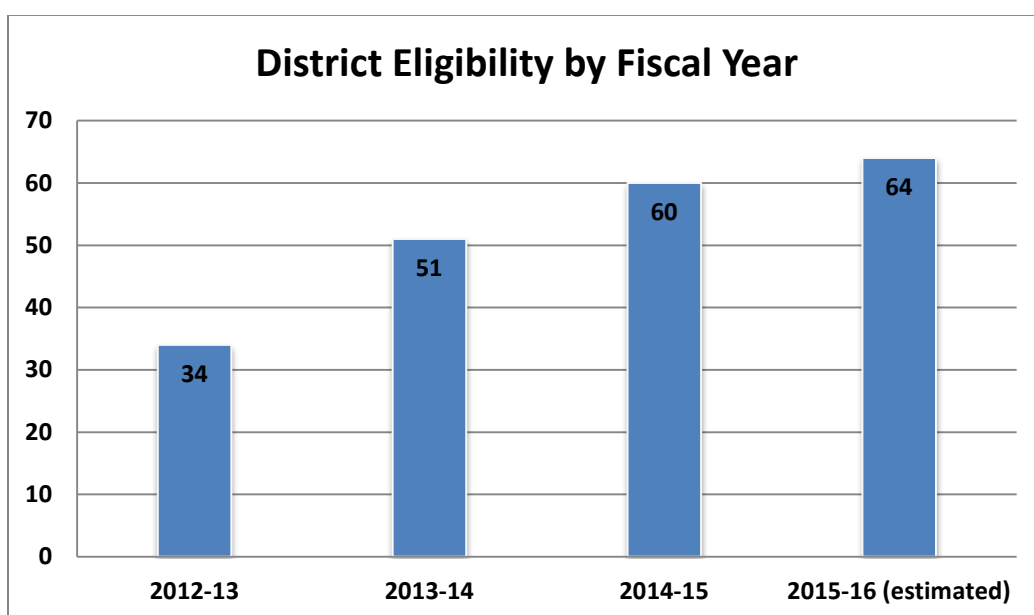
² The achievement gap is the difference between the percentages of students who scored Meet or Exemplary on PASS for all students statewide and students participating in CDEPP.

Issue 1: Access to CDEPP Has Expanded

There are an estimated 58,999 four-year-olds in South Carolina. Approximately, 71 percent of these children are in poverty. Statewide, an estimated 46 percent of all at-risk four-year-olds are served in a publicly funded early education program in 2014-15 as compared to 35 percent in the prior year.

In school districts in which children were eligible to participate in the state-funded, full-day 4K program for more than one year, at least 71 percent of all at-risk four-year-olds are currently being served in a publicly funded program, up from 62 percent in the prior school year.

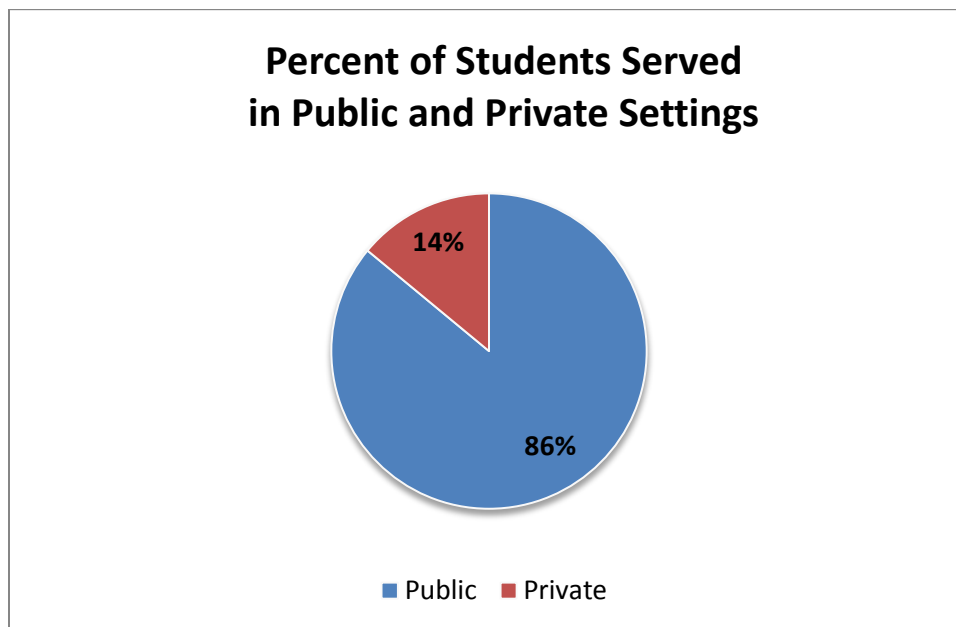
As district eligibility requirements have broadened, the number of districts participating in CDEPP has almost doubled.



Fiscal Year	Eligibility	Number of Eligible Districts
2012-13	Limited to Trial & Plaintiff Districts	34
2013-14	Districts with poverty index of 75% or more	51
2014-15	Districts with a poverty Index of 70% or more	60
2015-16 (estimated)	Districts with a poverty index of 70% or more	64

A majority of children are served in public schools, with approximately 14% being served in private childcare settings. Private childcare providers continue to be vitally important to CDEPP. In three counties (Barnwell 45, Horry and Union) that opted not to

participate in CDEPP during 2014-15, 18 private providers in these counties are educating 253 children who would not otherwise be able to participate.



While the public school system serves 86% of students enrolled in CDEPP, they receive less than three fourths of total state funding.

**Total Funding in FY2014-15
(Recurring, Non-recurring and Carry Forwards)**

Entity	Funding	Percent
SCDE	\$53,815,144	72%
OFS	\$21,204,924	28%
Total	\$75,020,068	

The General Assembly has more than adequately funded the program in Fiscal Years 2013-14 and FY2014-15.

Carry Forwards

Entity	FY2013-14 Actual	% of Total Budget	FY2014-15 Projected	% of Total Budget
SCDE	\$6,771,507	18%	\$6,655,814	18%
First Steps	\$4,004,031	34%	\$5,634,173	33%
Total	\$10,775,538		\$12,289,987	

The total in FY2014-15 does not include the additional \$4,004,031 carried forward by First Steps in the prior fiscal year.

The evaluation team recommends:

- No additional funds should be appropriated to the Office of First Steps for the program in FY2015-16. Instead, the General Assembly should reduce the appropriation to the Office of First Steps by at least \$2.0 million and reallocate those funds to the South Carolina Department of Education.
- To maintain fiscal accountability for the funds appropriated and expended for the program, the Office of First Steps should not make advance payments and only reimburse for actual services provided in each specific fiscal year.

Issue 2: CDEPP Participation Has Resulted in Modest Academic Gains in CDEPP Districts, but Statewide Achievement Gap Has Not Closed

Since 2010, the EOC has documented the academic achievement of students who participate in CDEPP. The initial analysis of students of five-year-old kindergarten demonstrated modest benefits for students who participated in CDEPP. Later analyses using state assessment on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) indicated students who participated in the program achieved at levels slightly higher than students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds who did not participate in the program but attended a public school in a CDEPP district. A greater percentage of CDEPP students met or exceeded state standards in ELA and mathematics than did low-income students in CDEPP districts who did not participate in the program.

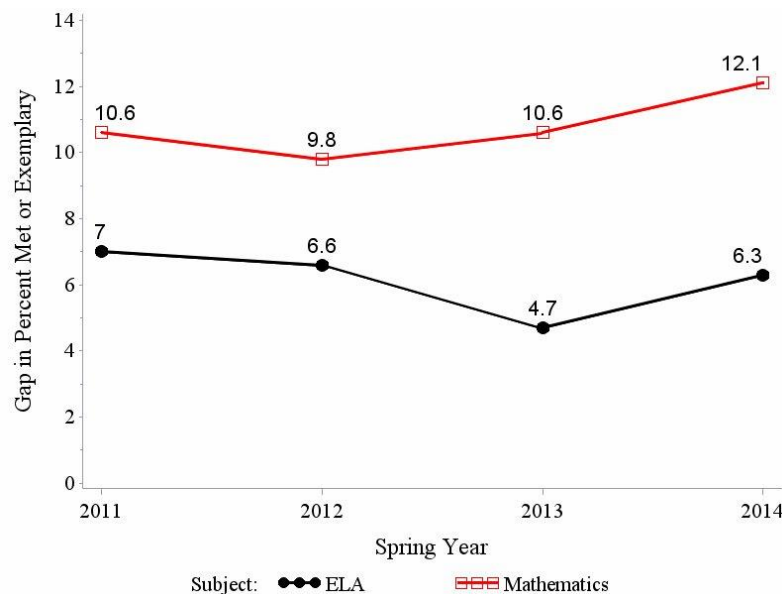
Percent of Students who Met or Exceeded State Standards on PASS

Academic Year	Grade	CDEPP Students		Low-Income Students in CDEPP Districts	
		ELA	Math	ELA	Math
2010-11	3	74	60	69	56
2011-12	4	72	68	66	66
2012-13	5	77	71	72	64
2013-14	6	61	61	54	56
2011-12	3	76	65	70	58
2012-13	4	73	73	66	66

		CDEPP Students		Low-Income Students in CDEPP Districts	
2013-14	5	74	68	67	60
2012-13	3	78	59	72	53
2013-14	4	67	64	63	59
2013-14	3	73	60	66	57

However, when considering ELA and math achievement in grade 3, there is concern the achievement gap between CDEPP students and all other students in the state is not narrowing. In math, the achievement gap may be increasing.

Achievement Gap between All South Carolina Students and CDEPP Students



Issue 3: Quality of Existing CDEPP Program Could Be Enhanced

Continued expansion of CDEPP may support school readiness for more at-risk four-year-old children, but there are no data or evidence that suggests that the quality of the educational experiences for children has improved over time.

On the private side, a majority of providers participate in DSS' ABC Quality program. More than one-quarter of CDEPP private providers participated in ABC Quality at the C level or did not participate at all. To continue developing a culture of quality instruction, all providers who participate in CDEPP by accepting state funding should participate in ABC Quality. On the public side, one-third of the schools currently offering full-day pre-kindergarten received an Absolute Rating of Excellent or Good. Approximately half of the schools received an absolute rating of Average, and 18% (or almost one in five) schools received an Absolute Rating of Below Average or At Risk.

Ongoing, consistent professional development for both public and private instruction is essential to high-quality instruction. Currently, provision of professional development at the state level is uneven. With three full-time staff, SCDE reports conducting site monitoring visits to 62 classrooms in districts participating for the first time and 12 visits to new classrooms in districts that had been participating in the program since its inception in 2006. First Steps' CDEPP team includes seven professionals supporting 144 centers with 1,780 students.³ First Steps reports conducting 1,746 monitoring visits in 2013-14 and projects conducting 2,970 visits during 2014-15.

Based upon the analysis of PASS results, specific attention to the professional development and training of CDEPP teachers in math must be enhanced. The recently-implemented *CIRCLE* assessment should be informative when considering strategies to modify or improve instruction so that students can be better prepared to read on grade level by grade 3.

A final, but equally important, approach to enhancing quality is for all pre-kindergarten providers in the State (SCDE, First Steps, Head Start) to collaborate and leverage existing local, state and federal resources to ensure the number of four-year-olds are educated with effective, high-quality instruction. A joint, consolidated community outreach strategy among the state level agencies could provide comprehensive information to eligible families about all pre-kindergarten options and encourage them to voluntarily enroll in the program that meets their children's individual needs for which they are eligible.

³ Data provided by First Steps indicates 144 centers are currently providing CDEPP (see Appendix C). Data provided by DSS indicates 153 centers are currently licensed and providing CDEPP (see Appendix E).

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Section I: Summary of Program Expansion in Fiscal Year 2013-14

- Ia: Of the \$48.6 million budgeted for the full-day 4K programs in 2013-14, approximately 78 percent was expended with the remainder, 22 percent or \$10.6 million carried forward into Fiscal Year 2014-15. The SCDE expended 82 percent of its appropriation and the Office of First Steps, 66 percent, which includes advance payments of 6 percent of the total budget.
- Ib: Regarding services provided, approximately 8,149 full-time students were funded with 85 percent enrolled in public schools and 15 percent in private centers.
- Ic: Children residing in 51 school districts were eligible to participate in the program with 47 school districts participating in the program through the Department of Education. Of the total number of children funded in public schools, approximately one-third or 34 percent resided in these expansion districts.
- Id: In the private centers administered by First Steps, a total of 1,368 children were served in 93 centers. Forty-six (46) percent of the centers were located in the expansion counties.

Section II: Program Expansion in Fiscal Year 2014-15

- IIa: SCDE projects that 10,685 children will be served in the full-day 4K program in 57 school districts in school year 2014-15.
- IIb: There are an estimated 542 classrooms funded in 2014-15 with 190 being new classrooms.
- IIc: Three school districts eligible to participate in 2014-15 opted not to participate: Barnwell 45, Horry and Union.
- IId: First Steps estimates 144 private child care providers are serving 1,780 to 1,790 children in 34 counties in full-day 4K in school year 2014-15.
- IIe: While Barnwell 45, Horry and Union school districts decided not to participate in 2014-15, 18 private providers in Barnwell, Horry and Union counties are participating in CDEPP and serving 253 children.⁴
- IIg: To date, 1,780 children with unique student identifiers are enrolled in the full-day 4K program in school year 2014-15 in 144 centers in 31 counties.

⁴ See Appendix C for more detail.

- IIh: In addition to the \$4.0 million carried forward in the prior fiscal year, OFS currently projects an additional balance of \$5.6 million in the program in 2014-15.

Section III: Projections of At-Risk Children Served

- IIIa: There are an estimated 58,999 four-year-olds in South Carolina. Approximately, 71 percent of these children are in poverty.
- IIIb: Statewide, an estimated 46 percent of all at-risk four-year-olds are served in a publicly funded early education program as compared to 35 percent in the prior year.
- IIIc: In school districts in which children were eligible to participate in the state-funded, full-day 4K program for more than one year, at least 71 percent of all at-risk four-year-olds are currently being served in a publicly funded program, up from 62 percent in the prior school year. In the ten districts eligible for the first time in 2014-15, at least 54 percent of all at-risk four-year-olds are served in a publicly funded program. (Table 8)
- IIId: Approximately 20,218 children in the districts that were not eligible to participate in 2014-15 who are in poverty and at-risk for school failure. Fourteen percent (14%) of these children are currently being served.
- IIIE: The number of four-year-olds participating in Head Start declined from 6,364 in 2013 to 5,975 in 2014.

Section IV: PASS Performance of Children Served in CDEPP

- IVa: The PASS achievement results in ELA and mathematics document that across all academic years and cohorts, a greater percentage of CDEPP students met or exceeded state standards in ELA than in mathematics.
- IVb: Furthermore, across all academic years and cohorts, a greater percentage of CDEPP students met or exceeded state standards in ELA and mathematics than did low-income students in CDEPP districts who did not participate in the program.
- IVc: In looking at just grade 3 achievement in ELA and mathematics for CDEPP students, there is concern that the achievement gap between CDEPP students and all other students in South Carolina is not narrowing, and in mathematics the achievement gap may be increasing. The achievement gap is the difference between the percentages of student who scored Met or Exemplary on PASS for all South Carolina students and CDEPP students.

Section V: Implementation of *CIRCLE* Assessment

- Va: Reliability information is generally high for the Language and Literacy and Social & Emotional Skills-Checklist scales, showing internal consistency of *CIRCLE* assessment scores within a single administration of the test.
- Vb: For Language and Literacy subscales, reliability estimates were generally high across time points, showing consistency of scores over time.
- Vc: Validity information showed alignment of *CIRCLE* assessment scores with existing standardized measures used to measure preschoolers' language and literacy skills and social and emotional skills. Correlation values were in expected directions and at a moderate level, showing concordance of information across tests.
- Vd: Validity information for Language & Literacy subtests was slightly lower for 3-year old children; however, these children are the youngest of the tested age groups.
- Ve: Confirmatory Factor Analysis provided support for the internal structure of the PA scales.
- Vf: Limited information was presented to describe the sample used for analyses. The sample is not a norming or probabilistic sample, but a sample of largely low-income preschool aged children. The sampling procedure collected information from multiple states; however, no information was provided to show how many children were from a given state.
- Vg: Only one form of reliability was provided for the Social and Emotional Skills-Checklist. Information concerning the sample size used, other forms of reliability, or reliability estimates by age were not provided.
- Vh: Correlation tables are provided without reference to the number of preschoolers used in the analyses.
- Vi: No information regarding item level information (e.g., item difficulty, discrimination /adjusted point biserial correlations) is provided to show how individual items are performing.
- Vj: The technical manual did not present any information concerning a review of items for potential differential item functioning across groups of preschoolers (e.g., sex, race/ethnicity) to ensure that items function without bias across different groups.
- Vk: The scoring for the manual stated that *CIRCLE* assessment scores were provided using sum scores. Error is inherent in sum scores created using item level data. Similarly, latent (or other) scores could be presented at each cutoff value to support that the cutoff values relate to discrimination.
- Vl: There was no discussion of how the internal structure of the Phonological Awareness scale related to the scoring of the test.

- Vm: Confirmatory Factor Analysis information should also include standardized item parameters. The sample (over 10,000 children) could be split in half to validate analyses.

Section VI: Measures of Quality

- VIa: In order to improve CDEPP program quality, a higher level of collaboration and coordination of current training and technical assistance resources is needed at the state level to ensure CDEPP providers have high-quality learning environments so they can provide high-quality instruction. More integrated training and technical assistance would allow for additional leveraging of scarce resources.
- VIb: More than one-quarter of CDEP private providers participated in ABC Quality at the C level or did not participate in ABC Quality at all. C level centers meet, but do not exceed, basic health and safety regulations and standards.
- VIc: The data reflect that one-third of the schools offering a full-day 4K classroom in 2014-15 are schools that received an absolute rating of Excellent or Good in 2014. Approximately half of the schools received an absolute rating of Average in 2014. And, 18 percent or almost one in five schools received an absolute rating of Below Average or At Risk.
- VId: Based upon current national definitions of “high quality” preschool programs, CDEPP has met some, but not all, high quality standards (including high staff qualifications and ongoing program monitoring).
- VIe: Provision of professional development and technical assistance at the state level is uneven. SCDE provides professional support with three staff dedicated to professional support for 542 classrooms with 10,685 students. First Steps’ CDEPP team includes seven professionals supporting 144 centers with 1,780 students.⁵

Recommendations

The evidence presented in the report documents that access to full-day 4K education programs has been greatly expanded. Eligible children residing in 60 districts in South Carolina in 2014-15 may participate in full-day 4K. Statewide, an estimated 46 percent of all at-risk four-year-olds participate in a publicly funded full-day 4K program, up from 35 percent in the prior year.

With the implementation of the *CIRCLE* assessment, there will also be evidence of the early literacy needs of children participating in the program. The evidence along with discussions with the Office of First Steps to School Readiness, the South Carolina Department of Education and the Head Start Collaboration Office confirm that the three entities operate at the state level independently of one another. And, while both the Office of First Steps to School Readiness and the South Carolina Department of

⁵ Data provided by First Steps indicates 144 centers are currently providing CDEPP (see Appendix C). Data provided by DSS indicates 153 centers are currently licensed and providing CDEPP (see Appendix E).

Education provide professional development and technical assistance opportunities, there is no coordinated effort to measure and improve quality classroom experiences for children at the state level. Consequently, the evaluation team offers the following recommendations to the General Assembly for its consideration:

Recommendation 1: While expansion in the state-funded full-day 4K program has occurred, a more integrated, focused effort to leverage existing 4K program opportunities and enhance the quality of current 4K programs opportunities needs to be considered.

Recommendation 2: Statewide, the number of four-year-olds participating in Head Start declined from 6,364 in 2013 to 5,975 in 2014. Consequently, at the state and local levels greater collaboration between the Office of First Steps, the South Carolina Department of Education and the Head Start Collaboration Office must occur to insure that parents have all relevant information to determine if and which 4K program best serves the individual needs of their children. The evaluation team would recommend all three 4K providers develop a joint, consolidated community outreach strategy that encourages families of students at-risk of school failure to enroll in voluntary full-day quality 4K programs. An example of such collaboration would be the joint publication and distribution of a brochure for families to use in understanding the program and in choosing a provider of services.

Recommendation 3: The evaluation team could not find any statutory authority allowing the expenditure of funds for “advance payments.” To maintain fiscal accountability for the funds appropriated and expended for the program, the evaluation team recommends that the Office of First Steps cease making advance payments and only reimburse for actually services provided.

Recommendation 4: Advancements in quality and improvements in young students’ readiness should be incentivized, utilizing assessment data (i.e. individual student growth, classroom environment, teacher child interaction.) At a minimum any private provider participating in state-funded full-day 4K should be required to participate in ABC Quality.

Recommendation 5: The Office of First Steps carried forward \$4.0 million in FY2013-14 and is projected to carry forward an additional \$5.0 million in the current fiscal year. No additional funds should be appropriated to the Office of First Steps for the program, even with the addition of four districts that will be eligible to participate in FY2015-16. Instead, the General Assembly should reduce the full-day 4K appropriation to the Office of First Steps by at least \$2.0 million and reallocate those funds to the South Carolina Department of Education. Public schools are serving 86 percent of the four-year-olds in the program but received 73 percent of the total funds appropriated for the program in FY2014-15.

Recommendation 6: South Carolina should invest in improving the quality of CDEPP by addressing staff qualifications, implementation of formal, systematic continuous improvement initiatives with ongoing program monitoring. Program monitoring should include frequent assessments of the classroom environment, including the quality of teacher-child interactions. The evaluation team would point to the school district of Florence 1 as a model.

Recommendation 7: Based upon analysis of PASS results, specific attention to the professional development and training of CDEPP teachers in math must be enhanced.

Recommendation 8: When the results of the fall 2014 *CIRCLE* assessment can be analyzed, the data should be used to refocus on measuring the quality of instruction in 4K, 5K, 1st and 2nd grades, especially to prepare all students to be reading proficiently by 3rd grade.

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